Beyond work and life: Constructing new domains in the digital age

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Abstract

Work-life balance (WLB) is a metaphor for resolving the temporal conflict as we struggle to deal with competing demands on our time from different domains, broadly conceptualised as 'work' and 'life'. The concept of WLB has been widely criticised (e.g. Wapshott & Mallett, 2012) and contemporary use of digital technologies adds further complexity to this struggle (Duxbury, Higgins, Smart, & Stevenson, 2014). In this paper we focus on 'switching', whereby participants capture on video their everyday self-defined transitions between or within digital/physical domains, as a means of exploring how they construct the demarcations salient to them. In this paper, we examine the contribution of 'switching' to our understanding of the dynamics of domain construction, maintenance and boundary

management. Through our exploration of how participants 'switch' between domains in their daily lives, we consider this specifically in the context of an 'online' domain (not limited to 'work' or 'life'). We introduce the idea of *technological mirroring* and the challenges it presents to managing the online domain boundary. We examine the wider implications of how technology is integrated into work and life and also what have been considered to be third places. We suggest this may offer potentially new ways of conceptualising the traditional domains of 'work' and 'life' and the implications of this for the study of WLB.

Introduction

Changes in work practices, such as the advent of mobile technologies and flexible working practices, affect both how and where we work. Thus the division between work and non-work is less bounded by clear time markers (Carrigan & Duberley, 2013). The workplace may no longer be a discrete physical location (Kreiner, 2009) as we increasingly work from a range of locations. Boundaries between work and home and their associated roles become increasingly blurred (Harrington & Ladge, 2009; Tennakoon, da Silveira, & Taras, 2013) whilst a critical approach suggests the 'collapse' of the demarcation of the home/work environment (Wapshott & Mallett, 2012 p. 63). For example, technologies can create a borderland between 'work' and 'life' that cannot be exclusively identified with either domain. Here, we conceptualise these domains of 'work' and 'life' not as reified entities that we switch between but as socially constructed and contested. Part of a wider project looking at how digital technologies impact on WLB, our aim in this paper is to examine the integration of technology into the dynamics of how new demarcations are constructed and maintained and how boundaries are negotiated and managed. Our focus here is on the 'online' domain (with others noted for potential development).

Our focus on switching uses an approach designed to gain insight into how boundaries are negotiated and managed at moments in time across the day. This addresses the call from Allen and colleagues (2014 p. 116) for 'event-based experience sampling studies that record transition moments [as] especially useful…to gain insight into the daily management of enacted boundaries'. It builds on the observation that whilst research has focused on relatively lengthy transitions such as the commute to and from work (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), there are 'other much more random and unforeseen transitions that we find

ourselves making throughout our working days and in which we have a far weaker sense of control or personal agency' (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009 p. 232). Digital technologies in particular may make some of these transitions more like rapid 'switches', perhaps lasting only a few seconds. Our approach also builds on the 'time triage' metaphor (Carrigan & Duberley, 2013) sharing the aim of understanding how a limited commodity (time) is allocated to roles and tasks as participants switch between and within digital/physical domains.

Work, life and balance

Within the WLB literature, it is argued that we live our lives within different social domains (e.g. work, family) and that we play different roles within them (e.g. breadwinner, parent). Because of the complexity of these role identities, we create physical, temporal and psychological boundaries or borders between them (Clark, 2000). However, having created these boundaries, we then have to transition across them (Ashforth et al., 2000). While we have developed rituals and practices to help this transition, such as dressing for work and the commute, this process is helped or hindered by the 'permeability' or 'flexibility' of the boundaries.

As noted in Allen and colleagues' (2014) review, boundary theory and border theory both play a prominent role in understanding how we manage different and competing demands on our time. Boundary theory focuses on how people create, maintain, or change boundaries in an effort to simplify and classify the world around them (Ashforth et al., 2000). Border theory, developed in response to perceived limitations in WLB theories, focuses on work and family domains, specifically on the temporal, physical and psychological borders that divide the times, places, and people associated with work and family roles (Clark, 2000). It suggests that balance depends on factors such as the similarity of the work and family domains and the strength of the boundaries between domains. Increasingly, however, different forms of flexible working and increasing self-employment mean that more people work across a variety of locations, including the home, enabled by mobile digital technology. It is suggested that border theory is insufficient to address the complexities of exploring the experiences of those who work from home and / or who are self-employed, such as entrepreneurs (Di Domenico, Daniel, & Nunan, 2014).

Critical approaches to WLB

There are noted methodological and conceptual limitations to the WLB concept (Warhurst, Eikhof, & Haunschild, 2008). A broad concern is the dualism of WLB implying two different and competing domains, particularly given the blurring of 'work' and 'life' highlighted above which may make 'balance' an unhelpful metaphor (Warhurst et al., 2008). Other critical approaches have problematised the concept of WLB as both metaphor and ideology (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007; Vair, 2013). These studies highlight the individualistic orientation of the concept and its underlying neo-liberal assumption that individuals freely construct their own lives (Vair, 2013). This foregrounds individual agency, part of the 'personal control of time WLB discourse' (Lewis et al., 2007 p. 361), which prioritises individual responsibility and choice over structural and organizational factors. Indeed, this is in line with constructions of the 'ideal WLB worker' who chooses to prioritise work over 'life' and 'go the extra mile' (Mescher, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010 p. 34).

We echo calls to move beyond 'balance and boundary' (Warhurst et al., 2008 p. 12). We share the view that boundary theory is 'analytically limited' (Warhurst et al., 2008 p. 16) but is a useful starting point for this journey (Cohen et al., 2009). Our research approach builds on this point of departure but in line with other work in this area challenges the notion of 'work' and 'life' as reified entities. Rather we see them as constructions reinforced and renegotiated in the course of daily interactions; they are socially constructed and contested domains (Cohen et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2007). This recognises that social, political and epistemological choices determine what is defined and seen as work and 'not work' (Okhuysen et al., 2013). Our research interest is in how we construct and negotiate these domains and our transitions between them. We are intrigued by the possibilities such as those explored by Bourne & Forman (2014) in their study of women business owners who work 'flexibly'. These authors identified techniques such as working lightly (making overwork feel better) and working lite (making it feel not like work) which challenge the traditional domains of work and life. By using a combined visual research methodology, our aim is to explore and utilise the implicit knowledge of participants in their everyday practices, through a focus on 'the ordinary and everyday' (Rose, 2014 p 28).

Moving beyond 'balance and boundary': Conceptualising 'third places'

'Third places' were always a part of boundary theory but subsidiary to the first and second places of home and work (Ashforth et al., 2000 p. 473) and often focused on those in organizational settings, what Oldenburg defines as 'the core settings of informal public life' (1997 p. 16). So the initial conceptualisation was of physical 'third places' such as churches, gyms and cafes and other social domains (Ashforth et al., 2000). There is scope for re-imaging these third places in light of the increasing interest in the role of mobile communication technology in the process of segmenting and/or integrating the domains of work and life (Duxbury et al., 2014) including the management of digital boundaries of being online (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). Research has begun to explore how we construct online digital identities and the influences on our willingness to 'overlap private and work profiles to create a univocal online persona' (Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2015 p. 153).

This work extends the notion of third places to online settings such as social media sites and networks. Some studies describe the space created by such technologies as a borderland that is neither work nor home but border theory research 'typically does not conceptualise this status' (Dén-Nagy, 2014 p. 198). Garvey (2007 p. 51), drawing on game studies, proposes 'an evolving and emergent meta domain', or 'info cloud', which has no natural boundaries but intrudes into existing segmented places such as work, life and third places. He suggests that flexibility and permeability are characteristics of the always-on connectivity of email and instant messaging, blurring and blending life and work domains and requiring new conceptual tools to better account for the dynamics of these relationships. One such tool suggested by Di Domenico and colleagues is the notion of liminality; these authors suggest extending understanding of this concept by considering liminality not just as 'temporary positions or spaces' but as a more 'long-lasting state of being' brought about by 'online spaces, interactions and identities' (Di Domenico et al., 2014 p. 270). They explore the 'mental mobility' of online home-based entrepreneurs, whose paradoxical arrangement means that they can feel simultaneously connected in their online world but isolated in their physical world. We build on this in our examination of dynamics of the online domain.

Methodology

Participants were selected, in line with boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), to provide potentially contrasting experiences of both WLB and digital technologies through their occupational roles. In other words the groups had the potential for different interpretations of 'work' and 'life' and what constituted a switch between their roles. The groups also addressed the call for expanded definitions of responsibilities within a wider range of household configurations (other than couples with children) and non-work commitments (Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, & Bell, 2011). Table 1 below sets out the basic demographic data for the participants:

Table 1: Participant demographic data

		Social Entrepreneurs (SEs)	Office Workers (OWs)	University Students (USs)	Total
Gender	Female	7	8	8	23
	Male	8	7	7	22
Age Group	18-24	-	-	11	11
	25-34	4	5	4	13
	35-44	2	4	-	6
	45-54	7	3	-	10
	55-64	2	3	-	5
Family Situation	Living alone	5	2	5	12
	Living with others*	1	1	8	10
	Living with partner	2	5	2	9
	Living with child(ren)	2	-	-	2
	Living with partner and child(ren)	5	7	-	12

*others = flatshare (with friends or others), halls of residence

A total of 45 participants were therefore drawn from three UK-based groups: (1) social entrepreneurs whose challenges may include financial insecurity, commitment to create social value, and lack of a defined workplace; (2) office workers whose challenges may include having less control over work processes and use of technologies, and a variety of

more closely defined role identities; and (3) university students (undergraduate or postgraduate aged 18-25) whose challenges may include ill-defined work-life boundaries and identity permeability. The groups, whilst distinct, nevertheless shared some work patterns. Many office workers utilised the option to request flexible working through job share, compressed hours, or working at home for part of the week. Some social entrepreneurs combined their (often home-based) enterprise activities with part-time office-based employment. Some students doing PhDs spent long hours working in research labs. Across all groups, some participants did additional voluntary work. Overall, we found greater overlap in WLB characteristics between the groups than we had anticipated.

The aim of the video diaries was to capture real-time 'switches': these could be between or within digital/physical domains, and could be of any time duration. Participants undertook a week of video recording, focusing on their different roles in their work and private lives and how they switched (or tried to switch or were externally prompted/forced to switch) between them. After a briefing session, each participant was asked to keep a video diary of any 'switching' they noted across different aspects of their lives for a period of one week. Significantly they made their own decisions as to what constituted a 'switch' for them. We also asked participants to narrate a commentary as they filmed. One of our objectives was to understand participants' interpretations and experiences. A switch could therefore be from 'home' to 'work' but it could equally be between other domains that incorporated aspects of both work and life. Thus we allowed for the possibility of new alternative boundaries to emerge. The approach required them to capture what they saw in front of them, rather than to narrate these switches retrospectively, though we explained this would be a useful supplement to switches too difficult to capture as they happened. We stressed there was no 'right way' to approach the task, that it was up to them how to record the material, and that they were free to be creative in their approach. Both work and home were significant arenas for our data construction; additionally some participants also worked from home. At the end of the week, participants were debriefed and returned the video recordings, retaining copies of these for their own reflexive viewing.

Participants then attended an hour long recorded interview. The aim was to discuss excerpts from their video data and to embed these discussions in a deeper understanding of participants' lives, exploring their own constructions of WLB, switches and technology use through the reflexivity afforded by the video methodology. Meanwhile, the researchers also

viewed the videos and selected 3 – 5 excerpts to discuss in the interviews as 'critical incidents'. Interviews covered four main areas: occupational background and technologies used; WLB including strategies for managing this; switches, including triggers for switching; and methodological reflections on using the camcorder. Video data and accompanying transcripts were imported into NVivo10. Recorded interviews were transcribed and also entered into NVivo10. Both video and interview data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The same umbrella themes (WLB, identity, boundaries, switching, technology and methodology) were used across the video and interview datasets for coherence of analysis.

Our empirical interest also extended beyond the work/non-work switch, aiming to capture switches salient to the participants between different roles or aspects of their lives. Our aim was therefore to critique and re-conceptualize the concepts of 'work' and 'life' by analysing the participants' social constructions of work and life. Through a focus on switching we aimed to provide insight into where new boundaries emerge in participants' physical and digital worlds, a key contribution to the WLB literature, through the examination of the role of modern communication technology in the construction of these boundaries and their negotiation.

Findings

We present here findings from both our video and interview data that begin to explore how a specific 'online' domain is constructed, maintained and its boundaries managed by our participants. Through this, we can begin to examine the contribution of our focus on 'switching' as a means to explore how participants construct demarcations salient to them. Our findings are organised around three themes: the dynamics of boundary construction, the dynamics of domain maintenance and the dynamics of boundary management. By focusing on the 'online' domain, we can begin to explore how digital technology is integrated into the notion of third places potentially eroding boundaries between the traditional domains of work and personal or home life which now co-exist. Finally, as hinted at in the title of this paper, we also consider the potential for other new domains constructed by participants.

Dynamics of 'online' domain construction

In this section we explore the emergence of a new domain ('online') which some participants invoked through their identification of switching to and from it.

> *'So I think what we need to do now is - we've still got the best part of 40 minutes, as I need to transition over to my online world and I need to check my emails.'* (Michael, social entrepreneur, video)

This '*online world*' allows for both personal and work activities to occur in the same virtual environment with little if any separation. It may also be populated with different people to those known in other domains, as in this extract:

> *'I try to just connect with people … that I've never met but I know online…one company called Enterprise Nation used to have a water-cooler moment, so at 11 o'clock in the morning they'd run a water-cooler moment with the hash tag water-cooler moment and any freelancers and small businesses could join in, just to chat, you know, just to break up the day and make connections and stuff like that'.* (Sally, social entrepreneur, interview)

The participant describes her use of social media as part of her online world, here seeking to replicate aspects of the physical world of the office, with its daily water-cooler chat routine. For some participants their online world is populated with the same people as their physical world.

> *'All my roles – there is no switch between them as they are all inter-linked. My business role goes into my circle of friends as the business is carried by my friends who are part of my online community so when I talk to them then it's me as an entrepreneur even if it's to a friend or even when I am a son, as my parents are also on the website.'* (Allan, social entrepreneur, debrief)

Roles are not distinguished and there is no perception of a switch once within the online domain; it's all part of their 'online community'.

Consistent with this notion of an online domain, we observed participants engage in both work and personal emails using the same digital platform without perceiving this as a 'switch' between domains. Here one participant describes what she has been doing on her iPad:

> *'I wrote those ideas for the blogs [part of the participant's work role as a social entrepreneur]. Then I just thought, oh I'll just email Judy [her client], let her know, and then checked my emails and deleted everything. And there was an offer on Mountain Warehouse and I bought myself some new walking boots because my*

walking boots are rubbish and it's my birthday on Saturday, so they're being delivered. And then I went online and sorted out [an event] for Saturday night followed by a meal for a group of us. So that's all my online stuff done now hopefully for the day.' (Jane, social entrepreneur, video)

The participant's term '*all my online stuff*' referring to a mix of work, personal and social activities suggests a potential lack of salience regarding the concept of switching between the domains of work and personal life. Rather than see these domains as separate, the use of digital technology constructs a new domain 'online' which creates new roles and tasks for that day that span what might otherwise be seen as the different domains of work and personal life.

For some participants, the online domain was constructed through the act of switching to and from it, as in the examples above. For others, amongst the students and social entrepreneurs, it could be a more pervasive state. The 'always connected' nature of their lives meant that they either found it difficult to determine switches between traditional work and life domains – or simply these boundaries were not salient to them once in their online domain, as in the following extract.

'I just got back from training and I was just thinking on the way, I was listening to music from my phone and I realised that it's really hard to determine a switch when you're using technology, because you use it constantly. For example we use our phones all the time. I sometimes use my phone during lectures when it vibrates and tells me that I've got a new notification.'(Benjamin, student, video)

This extract shows how being always online means there is no perception of any switch between, here, the student role in a lecture and a social role in answering a notification on a mobile phone. This might be due to technology delivering a constant and pervasive internet connection across a specific location such as a university campus, or through a mobile device which enabled the same level of connectivity in whatever physical location they were. Some participants constructed the internet in slightly different ways though we found these were not generally inconsistent with the construction of an online domain. The instrumentality of internet technology as both an enabler and a distractor was a common theme.

In addition to participants noting switching to the online domain, they also switched off from it (disconnecting), though often with great difficulty, a topic we return to below in our consideration of the dynamics of boundary management of the online domain. We observed

what we describe as *technological mirroring*, where the nature of 'always on' technology of the online domain eroded temporal boundaries, for example around working hours, and imposed a responsibility to be always working and always available. As one participant put it, "*If you can work anywhere anytime sometimes you feel like you should*" (Liz, office worker, interview). This sense of obligation was sometimes specifically ascribed to the 'always on' affordances of online technology since 'online' was also the location of the participant's business:

> *'it's never switched off because it never finishes especially because it's an online business, a platform business that doesn't sleep… usually once people leave the job, leave the manufacturing floor it's closed and you switch off as a manager, but for us it doesn't. So it never switches off.'* (Allan, social entrepreneur, interview)

For others, there was an additional sense of an organizational expectation to be always connected.

> *'people of a particular grade get given these mobile devices, and I think there is underlying an expectation that, you know, you are mobile then and ... you can be easily contacted and connect at those times outside of your office.'* (Kath, office worker, interview)

Switching off from the online domain was seen by some as essential and by others as a source of great anxiety. For most, such disconnection often meant a physical switch, to outside, where the natural world acted a resource for many in which to re-charge, problem-solve and engage with family and friends in the physical world. We now turn to consider the dynamics of how participants maintained the online domain.

Dynamics of online domain maintenance

Online lives require a lot of maintenance. We found that participants engaged in a range of tasks specifically to maintain their online domain. These tasks, for example, 'managing emails', are performed by individuals to support their use of digital technologies, in particular those that sustain and maintain 'being online' across all aspects of their lives. Although such work is often carried out in pursuit of different forms of 'flexible' working, it nevertheless problematizes the traditional binary domains of 'work' and 'life'. These are tasks seen as similar to domestic housekeeping; one participant (Mark, social entrepreneur) talked about '*clearing my bins*' to describe deleting documents from folders on his laptop. Another

(Michael, social entrepreneur) commented when sweeping up leaves in the garden *'they need raking up, so this is my analogy with dealing with the emails, hav[ing] to deal with the leaves, the leaves are tangible, they do still keep on coming but nicer than the inbox otherwise known as the lawn'*'. Intrigued by such domestic work analogies in the data (echoed in the literature – see the Discussion below), we termed the role or tasks to maintain the online domain as 'digi-housekeeping'.

Whereas the domestic housekeeper ensures the smooth running of the household, digi-housekeeping focuses on maintaining the smooth running of the online domain. Domestic housekeeping focuses on the internal aspects of the house such as cleaning, tidying, organizing storage, provisioning, and attending to wear and tear of domestic items. To the outside world, such work is often invisible and, when done for ourselves, is unpaid. We argue that digi-housekeeping is similarly hidden and unrewarded. It involves similar tasks to support 'being online' across the traditional domains of work and personal life. These are needed to ensure the participant can engage with the online domain and maintain other related requirements of 'flexible' working. Where participants use social media, their digi-housekeeping also involves maintaining various online presences across a variety of social media (with a felt need to be virtually 'present' in various places) and checking for information in case they are missing out.

In presenting the dynamics of maintaining the online domain, we organise these around three themes. The first aspect is what we describe as clearing and organising. This is the technological equivalent of keeping junk out of places where we live and work or setting up storage and filing systems to keep things organized. Inboxes need to be cleaned of junk mail, emails tidied into meaningful folders, software updates installed, devices synced, digital equipment maintained and replaced when it breaks down or becomes out-of-date, file storage requires organizing, gadgets made ready for use and sorted out when they fail, and time and money is invested in the pursuit of what is 'new and better' that promise greater online efficiency. In this example, one participant is at home trying to sort out a Virtual Personal Network (VPN) connection to her office so that she can log on and complete a work task:

> *'Let's see if my connection will actually connect me to the network. Is it going to open it? It's not normally this bad. So I think I'm going to have to do the time-honoured test of, let me just try and disconnect the Wi-Fi first. I'll just connect VPN and re-connect without, or I'm going to have to do the old 'off and on' again. It wants my*

credentials again. Why does it want my credentials? I'm going to have to switch it off and back on again. Terrific. So that's taken me about half of my life to do that.' (Liz, office worker, video)

The VPN connection enables Liz to work at home in the evening, but clearly requires time ('*half of my life*') and effort ('*disconnect' 're-connect' 'enter credentials again'*) to make it work on this occasion. This is part of an ongoing struggle she articulates about working from home in the evenings: '*in my mind, I shouldn't need to work from home, so, to me it's just a matter of organising things a bit better through the day and I shouldn't have to. I don't want to. I don't enjoy it, and I'd much rather not*.' (Liz, office worker, interview). Here the irony of the digi-housekeeping task is that it supports something which the participant neither wants to do or feels that she should have to do.

The second aspect is managing expectations (closely linked to the dynamics of boundary management, discussed in more detail in the next section). An online presence means participants need to manage the expectation that they will respond to emails immediately whatever the time. But this means they then need to take steps to re-negotiate this expectation which they find difficult, for example, one working parent explains how she feels under pressure to respond to emails or texts just after her son has come back from school because it's a time of day in which she thinks others are working. For others, a specific online presence established for one purpose can bring additional unexpected responsibilities, as here:

'I joined LinkedIn and set up a rather meagre profile a while ago because I wanted to get some details about someone I knew to pass them on to help them get a consultancy role….But since then, I've got what, at least for me, is quite a lot of emails. So I now have 171 un-responded to emails that have come out of LinkedIn. …And, not only have I not responded to these various emails, but it does sometimes concern me that the people whose emails I haven't responded to might be wondering why on earth I'm not responding.' (Marlon, office worker, video)

In this example, the participant highlights his worry about what people will think when he fails to reply. One way of managing this type of expectation is setting 'out of office' messages on email accounts but participants reported how they undermined this strategy by then replying to emails anyway.

The third aspect is supporting an online presence, often across a range of social media. These digi-housekeeping tasks are mostly unremunerated but are seen by participants as an essential part of enabling remunerated work. They may also enable flexible working patterns. These tasks might be specifically to support an online identity for their work.

> *"Some .. SEs .. use social media quite a lot .. promoting themselves on it…. [I'm] quite limited in terms of what I can actually do [because of family] .. When you spend time looking at those things … it gives me some anxiety because I'm looking at it and saying 'wow he's doing that and that's interesting' … why am I not doing that?"* (David, social entrepreneur, interview)

This constant comparison with others created for some participants an ongoing sense of obligation to keep posting material on social media. As with other digi-housekeeping tasks, these are not easily classified as work or non-work. As we now explore, this raised the issue of boundary management in respect of the online domain.

Dynamics of boundary management

Being online, particularly using mobile technologies, changed where our participants could carry out work. This was not just in the sense of being able to work outside an office, but of work also colonising various parts of the house. A number of our participants described being online and using their digital technologies in the bathroom in their video diaries. In the following example, we show how digital technology erodes boundaries that have previously confined tasks to either a work or personal domain and to particular physical locations.

> "*Yesterday I kind of had a sense that I'd managed to get on the right side of keeping on top of my emails although I haven't checked, well I have checked this morning. Actually when I was, when I was showering I took my mobile phone with me and I did check some emails whilst I was in the bathroom and I got rid of about 20 junk emails so I have a sense of how many new ones have come in."* (Michael, social entrepreneur, video)

Mobile communication technology here erodes the physical boundary of the bathroom as a non-work space; the online domain enables the daily email management task whilst showering and significantly, this is not described as a switch. Rather poignantly, one participant commented '*effectively I wake up in an office…Breakfast, it should be kind of a time when you're just relaxing and preparing yourself and getting ready for work but it's not really*' (Sam, social entrepreneur, interview), as he describes how he starts to think about

work as soon as he wakes up. He and many participants reached for their mobile phones on waking, the switch to the online domain seemingly preceding anything else.

Yet, paradoxically, given the erosion of physical boundaries, we observed how within the online domain participants' lives could also be very static as they mentally engage in a variety of activities while physically not moving at all. The online domain could be the location of a blend of activities spanning work, family and leisure as participants uploaded digital photos as a hobby, spoke to (physically absent) family members over Skype and dealt with work emails, watched motivational videos on YouTube all without moving from the same desk and computer. Managing the online boundary therefore became a matter of active negotiation for participants. With online technology eroding temporal and physical boundaries, many spoke about 'getting sucked in' whilst online, as in this extract.

> *'It's about 7.30 and I realise I came back about 5.30 and just got sucked into the computer again. So I spend too much of my time online but anyway I had some chats with my friends, did some work related stuff, it's all blending together. But I think I need to go and get some food'*. (Jez, social entrepreneur, video)

Here the participant talks about his blended activities online, across work and personal domains. Many others echoed the sense of being sucked in, getting side-tracked or distracted by and unable to switch away once within the online domain. Boundary management strategies included temporal, as in this extract.

> *'at the weekend I won't… I'll try and…say it's a digital detox so I'll try not to go online on Saturday and Sunday for… certainly for work things, I mean, I may go on for other stuff. But generally, you know, I try avoid putting the computer on because you can then... easily get side-tracked into responding to emails'* (David, social entrepreneur, interview).

Variations of this weekend 'digital detox' included physical strategies, particularly by student participants, to put the temptation of switching to the online domain literally out of reach by hiding their mobile under a pile of clothes on the bed or not taking their laptop onto campus, as in the following example.

> '*all of my lectures are two hour blocks and so it does take quite a lot to have to concentrate through all of that. And I found when I was, like, an hour into it I would be on Facebook the entire time. I'm not listening to what the lecturer was saying. So yes, I swapped my laptop for pen and paper. And yes, that is a boundary…I use pen*

and paper in lectures and I use my laptop for home, like, for non-university stuff.' (Ailsa, student, interview)

However, her strategy was undermined by others' use of technology. She explains:

'*One of my lecturers is really keen on using YouTube based videos… But then you are on YouTube already so it's easier to just say 'oh I'll just watch this video or watch that video' and then two hours have gone'* (Ailsa, student, interview)

Other technological strategies were debated (blocking the router or dedicated apps to restrict browsing choices) but these were largely theoretical. In practice what we observed was how the affordances of digital technology supported a blend of activities and identities across work life boundaries within the online domain. This left participants wishing to use the online domain for one (say, personal) task then struggling to resist tackling another (say, work) task.

'*Okay, so it is seven forty-five now and my children are both in bed, which means that now I have some time to myself. I put my pyjamas on, which means that the business part of the day is over. Now, usually between eight and ten, ten-thirty each night is when we have leisure time. So, now I'm just going to watch some telly. I'm going to have a look at my iPad. The problem with the iPad is that it's a work iPad, which we're allowed to use for home use if we want, but because it's synced to my work Outlook, the mail icon is my work mail account, and I can see in the evenings, if I open it up to check Facebook, that I've got mail notifications.. . It requires all my self-control not to press that in the evening, but I don't want to look at it because it's just going to stress me out.*' (Liz, office worker, video)

In this example, her attempts to create a temporal boundary around 'work' are undermined by organizational practice and device affordances which both support the blended online domain. Other participants noted how a presence in the online domain made them visible to other people and '*fair game*' (Stephen, social entrepreneur, video) for work-related interruptions by others whatever time of the day or night.

Participants adopted a range of strategies for managing online identities. For some, this was a blended identity in which the boundaries were eroded between work and non-work roles. When asked how he managed a range of social media accounts for personal and work use, one participant replied:

'Well, I don't see it as [managing] because I don't try and separate things I'm quite free flow…for me it's the type of people that I have to relate to and [what] their preference [is]' (Stephen, social entrepreneur, interview)

But even those like Stephen who adopt a blended online identity, still face challenges in managing a different type of boundary, that between the public and the private. This does not necessarily map onto the traditional domains of work and life, but rather requires participants to negotiate a boundary in response to the requirements of an online presence, as in the next example.

> *'And I'm very conscious that for Twitter it's a bit work-ey… I'm much more mindful that actually it's my public persona… you don't say anything you'd regret on Twitter….'* (Stephen, social entrepreneur, interview)

Others faced a similar challenge, thinking twice about what they post online, aware of how material can be used by others. Observing '*there's a big overlap between personal and business because there is this emerging field of social marketing*' one participant described '*an overlap between my personal stuff and my work stuff, particularly in the Facebook groups*' but also how he has '*a protective wall of emails and websites and stuff that keeps my actual personal, personal life free of my crafted online persona life*' (Michael, social entrepreneur, interview). For many participants, multiple online identities involve similar careful management of the related boundaries. This involves choices about usage and what to post on which social media account (including some quite sophisticated rules) to juggling different online work identities. For some, there is recognition that an online identity was seen by others as lacking authenticity. Others rejected an online identity altogether, describing themselves as highly private.

> *'Although I'm aware of just, you know, how much information floats out and stuff, I'm actually very private generally, which is why I don't post things on Facebook and things like that. I don't want people to know that I'm, for example, in Texas. I don't want people to know that I've checked into a restaurant. I don't know why that is, it just bothers me personally. It's nobody else's business, what I'm up to, so I actually, I don't think I have an online identity as such. I certainly don't have one intentionally'.* (Jason, student, interview)

Whilst the emergence of a new boundary between the public and the private is not the main focus of this paper (as we discuss below), it is nevertheless an interesting aspect of the dynamics of identity management within the online domain.

Overall, in terms of the dynamics of managing the online boundary, we noted a complex picture reflecting the similarly complex relationship between participants and the internet.

For example, what for some was a potential solution to an 'always on' connectivity issue, was for others (or indeed the same people) a problem at other times, for example, when they were trying to be connected but were prevented due to some physical or technological obstacle. Having no Wi Fi at her elderly mother's house, was '*like working in the olden days*' yet the same participant (Cressida, social entrepreneur, video) craved dis-connectivity at other times to enable her to problem solve and clear her head suggesting that agency is a significant factor in the boundary management dynamics. Forced to be separated from internet or mobile device prompted some participants to see their need to be always connected as a dependency or addiction issue. Here a participant is at the theatre and unable to use his phone (which is lost):

> '*I have been feeling a sense of almost overwhelm … I don't know if it's stress., or panic, but kind of my heart accelerating, a bit of a sensation in the chest around the idea of having my email just keep on pouring, and not being able to use my phone to quickly reply, having to wait until I connect'* (Mark, social entrepreneur, video)

He recognises this love / hate relationship, articulating both the good and bad aspects of the internet ('*this great tool but it's also nuclear'*, Mark, social entrepreneur, interview).

Similarly, whilst being online was a source of distraction, for some its endless possibilities represented a source of key information and new connections, sharing experiences in real time, enabling opportunities and connections they would otherwise never make. Here a participant likens the pre-internet age with agricultural labouring:

> *'I suppose it's the difference between labouring in a field all day, picking cotton, and walking through a forest, and browsing berries, and I prefer the browsing berries life'* (Jez, social entrepreneur, interview).

On the other hand, as his quote shows, he uses a metaphor of '*browsing berries*' to describe his online life, for him a preferable, much richer and more rewarding experience than '*cotton picking*' labour. Given these properties, being away from the internet prompted a fear of missing out which could make the negotiation of the online boundary highly problematic.

> '*So, I know I could, like, close down Facebook and, kind of, open it if and, like… if and when I want to, but there will always be this nagging, kind of, thought in the back of my mind that I'm missing out on something, because Facebook is the main way that I talk to people outside of university, how I organise things and how I found out about, kind of, what's happening at… well, anytime really, and also, because it's*

online, I can just open up BBC and open up YouTube and stuff like that.' (Ailsa, student, video).

As noted above, the very affordances which make the online domain useful also make it hard to resist.

Looking across these findings, we can also examine the dynamics of domain construction and management within participants' wider discourses of WLB which challenge, for example, underlying assumptions regarding the extent to which individuals freely construct their lives. Fear of missing out, and its links to identity issues, can keep us within the online domain for much longer than we intend. We see, for example, how technology we use for one role is used by other people for other roles and how its affordances (for example, the temptation to mirror the 'always on' feature of the internet) can make it hard to ignore thus eroding the temporal boundaries we might seek to establish. This is particularly relevant given the pervasive discourse of internalised responsibility for managing and resolving WLB issues, for example, through 'working a bit harder'. Work v life is also not always the most salient boundary as we saw in our examination of the private v public boundary. We now turn our attention to looking across our current findings to assess what conclusions we might tentatively draw.

Discussion

Our methodology uses switching to examine self-defined transitions. Identifying participant-defined transitions revealed a potential online domain which encouraged us to explore the dynamics of how participants construct this domain, how they maintain it as well as how they manage its boundaries in their daily lives. We also introduce the notion of *technological mirroring,* a particular challenge to boundary management in the online domain. This work begins to integrate the use of digital technologies into the literature on third places and to conceptualise and detail the contours of this emergent new domain. We examine the implications of this, in particular, how what may have been considered to be third places can contribute to new ways of conceptualising what has previously been seen as 'work' and 'life'.

Reflecting on our findings, we consider why participants might create this online domain. The answer may lie in the complex and paradoxical relationship that many participants reported with the internet playing a dominant part in almost every aspect of their lives. This

in turn may be due to the affordances of digital technology and the 'always on' connectivity offered by the internet. These support a blend or range of identities and activities across the traditional domains of work and life, meaning that an online/offline boundary avoids the need to be concerned with a work life boundary. This offers a potential release from the concept of WLB which is largely internalised as a matter of individual personal responsibility. Ironically, freedom from managing a work life boundary may be replaced with a requirement to negotiate other boundaries instead, such as private versus public or between multiple online identities (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). We also note that technology and 'always on' connectivity that supports so-called flexible working is also constructed as a benefit (not just by participants in our data but more widely in media discourses). This may mean that the internet and its affordances are seen not simply as a tool but as an enabler with which they must engage, meaning that the downsides of flexible working are largely dismissed as an inevitable trade-off.

We found that online lives require considerable maintenance. As we show in our analysis of digi-housekeeping, the time this takes up is probably under-estimated by many people. It is seen as peripheral to 'real' work, is largely hidden and is an unacknowledged component of workdays. This may be because these everyday tasks may also support people's ability to work 'flexibly' as well as aspects of their private/personal lives. Such digi-housekeeping needs to be more acknowledged as essential activities that take time and need to be scheduled into our daily timetables. We need to estimate how much time is 'saved' by our use of digital technologies and the extent to which this squares with the extra time demands made. We also need to question who benefits from some of these tasks, as in the case of Liz being enabled to work at home in the evenings via a VPN when in fact she feels that she should not need to do so, if only she could manage her WLB better ('*just a matter of organising things a bit better through the day*'). This sense of personal responsibility for managing WLB was a recurrent theme in our data. We also see how participants internalise responsibility for boundary management. This raises the issue of how we might look beyond individual control in relation to WLB, for example, highlighting the limitations of flexibility, recognising the role of others in boundary management which we see in the data reported here, and issues of identity and power relations.

Although we have included an outline of our findings in relation to the dynamics of domain maintenance there is more analysis to be undertaken in order to develop these more fully.

We have already begun to explore boundary maintenance between private and public in the context of identity work (Symon, Chamakiotis, Whiting, & Roby, 2014). The concept of digi-housekeeping is also the subject of an upcoming conference paper (Whiting, Roby, Symon, & Chamakiotis, 2015). It is our intention that these two topics (private/public and digi-housekeeping) will be explored separately in other papers. For example, we are looking at digi-housekeeping in more detail, locating it as a form of digital labour. This was initially conceived as the creative work of individuals expended on the social web (Fuchs, 2014; Scholz, 2013) where digital technologies have eroded traditional distinctions between work and play online (Burston, Dyer-Witheford, & Hearn, 2010). These technologies reinforce the provision of such labour without payment (Scholz, 2013), prompting it to be likened to 'those less visible, unsung forms of traditional women's labor such as childcare [and] housework' Scholz (2013 p. 2). The analogy of female domestic work is further extended by conceptualizing insecure work requiring spatio-temporal flexibility as having been 'housewifized' (Fuchs, 2014). Our intention is to explore further the digi-housekeeping practices of our three participant groups, for example, extending the occupational settings in which the 'housewifization' of work has been considered, as well as considering the wider implications of such work.

As hinted at in the title of this paper, we are also exploring the possibility of other domains constructed by participants. One example is the construction of a domain of 'planning' which involves at least a daily (here, early morning) checking of the demands on the participant's time across work and personal life including checking the social activities of family and friends.

> '*The first thing I do when I wake up is check my iPad or my phone, depending what's nearest, to see what I've got on today. […] I like to […] sit in bed before anyone else gets up and just to kind of process what I need to do for that day, and how much capacity and gaps I've got. […] I go to my emails and check to see if anything's come in overnight or anything I need to focus on first thing when I get in this morning […]. I also, depending on how much time I have, take this opportunity just to have a quick look at Facebook.*' (Leanne, office worker, video)

In this example, the participant invokes a shared temporal focus ('*what I need to do for that day'*) to construct this domain of 'planning' which sits above and eases the management of work and personal life domains. We offer this as an example of other new domains which we intend to develop as part of the ongoing analysis of the project data.

Lastly we reflect on the contribution of a combined methodology involving interviews in which participant-generated videos were reflected upon and discussed. Asking them to record videos of moments of switching with commentary, leaving participants to determine what constituted a 'switch' for them and then discussing selected extracts in an interview, involved the participants in reflecting on their ordinary everyday activities in a way that they did not usually do – nor is this often done in research on work life balance. The methodology was thus particularly helpful in exploring the taken-for-granted aspects of our participants' lives (Rose, 2014). Participants reported that it gave them a distance from what they are usually immersed in, allowing them to articulate thoughts and feelings that usually remain implicit (Liebenberg, 2009). As researchers, we benefitted from how the methodology challenged our temptation to think that we understood the quite familiar territory of our participants' lives (Mannay, 2010). Through this paper, our aim has been to show how our methodology was useful not just in capturing the moment of 'switch' but also to show the importance of establishing the physical and personal context of participant's everyday negotiation of WLB. Through our focus on the online domain, specifically its construction, maintenance and management, we demonstrate the relevance of examining our ongoing negotiation of boundaries and how this contributes – through problematization - to our understanding of the concept of WLB.

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